

English for Academic and Professional Purposes

Quarter 1 – Week 4

Stating the Thesis Statement of an Academic Text



What is it?

Thesis Statement Defined

In the sample editorial, you probably caught a particular sentence that captures the writer's conviction about the issue. This sentence that gives the reader particular focus on the writer's perspective is called the thesis statement.

The thesis statement is the main idea of your paper that is usually conveyed in one declarative sentence. It serves as a summary of your writing and gives your viewpoint about a particular topic. It is like a signpost that tells your readers what to expect from your essay. Through the thesis statement, you guide your readers by briefly explaining your argument, giving clues on how you will defend your claim.

As a writing strategy, the thesis statement helps you determine what significant ideas to emphasize in your writing. You may evaluate your essay using your thesis to see if it is consistent with the ideas you have expressed. If your essay contains other useful information not reflected in your thesis, you might wish to revise it to include the information you have left out.

Although usually found at the start of the essay, it is not unusual to find the thesis statement in the concluding paragraph. But whether it is placed in the introduction or conclusion, the thesis statement serves as the basis for your outline.

PARTS OF A THESIS STATEMENT

The thesis statement should be concise enough to include only the essential parts. An arguable thesis statement consists of the following: the claim or conviction, objective, position, and issue. An important element of an arguable thesis statement is the issue or problem that the writer wants to tackle. This may be linked with the claim or conviction, which reflects the writer's argument. The claim may be a short phrase that expresses what the writer wants to prove. Although the thesis statement is usually expressed in one or two sentences, it should be able to accommodate the objective, which reflects what the writer wants to accomplish. The position is an expression of what the writer believes should be done about the issue.



What is it?

| CLAIM/CONVICTION (What do you want to prove?) | OBJECTIVE (What do you want to accomplish?) | POSITION (What do you believe and what shall be done about it?) | ISSUE/S (What are the problems?) |
|---|---|--|--|
| That junk food contains carcinogenic substances that jeopardize a person's health | That school authorities should ban junk food from food establishments within and near schools | That the government should impose stricter regulations concerning foods that are made available to school children | The proliferation of junk food; the deception committed by food manufacturers to lure school children to buy junk food packaged in attractive containers |
| Thesis: Due to the health risks posed by attractively packaged junk food containing harmful substances, authorities should ban those zero-nutrient food items within and near schools. | | | |
| Or: | | | |
| Thesis: Attractively packaged foods containing toxic substances pose health o school children; thus, authorities should ban those zero-nutrient within and near schools. | | | |



What is it?

What makes a strong thesis statement?

- A strong thesis statement gives direction to the paper and limits what you need to write about.
- It also functions to inform your readers of what you will discuss in the body of the paper.
- All paragraphs of the essay should explain, support, or argue with your thesis.
- It should be disputable, focused and relevant.

A thesis statement should:

- answer the questions 'how' and/or 'why';
- provide the logic of the paper;
- cover the entire paper.

The rest of the paper should:

- echo a thesis statement in every sentence;
- prove that the thesis statement is correct;
- repeat a rephrased thesis statement in the conclusion.

5 Groups of Never-Use Words:

- Personal pronouns – I, you, we
- Uncertainty qualifiers – might, maybe, perhaps
- Extremism symptoms – everything, all, none, always, never
- Vague formulations – some, kind of, somewhat
- Obvious exaggerations – life-saving, best of the best

6 Groups of Must-Use Words:

- Sources of information: studies reveal, research shows
- Realistic views: many, significant, most
- Characteristics: primarily, frequently
- Clear explanations: because, thus, for, due to, since
- Relationships: impact, influence, tendency, contribute to
- Active verbs: demonstrate, illustrate, identify, elucidate, present, inform



What is it?

10 Common Mistakes in Thesis Statements:

- 1) *Declaration of Topic*: Similarities of Societies.
- 2) *Questions*: Are there similarities between cultures?
- 3) *Captain Obvious*: Overeating is bad for health.
- 4) *Falling between 2 stools*: Sometimes this can happen, but sometimes it can't.
- 5) *Too many words* – keep it brief (up to 25 words).
- 6) *Making vows*: I am going to discuss, this paper will analyze, the purpose of my paper is...
- 7) *Random list*: Argument 1; argument 2; argument 3
- 8) *"I don't care that you don't care"* – Birds can divorce.
- 9) *Random sentence* – The origin of this concept dates back to 1487.
- 10) *Ambiguity overload* – This concept may have a number of practical implications, even though this theory has certain limitations.

EXAMPLES:

1. *Is your thesis statement too general?*

Original thesis:

There are serious objections to today's horror movies.

Revised theses:

- Because modern cinematic techniques have allowed filmmakers to get more graphic, horror flicks have desensitized young American viewers to violence.
- The pornographic violence in "bloodbath" slasher movies degrades both men and women.
- Today's slasher movies fail to deliver the emotional catharsis that 1930s horror films did

1. *Is your thesis statement clear?*

Original thesis: Although the timber wolf is a timid and gentle animal, it is being systematically exterminated. [if it's so timid and gentle -- why is it being exterminated?]

Revised thesis: Although the timber wolf is actually a timid and gentle animal, it is being systematically exterminated because people wrongfully believe it to be a fierce and cold-blooded killer.

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What is it?

2. Does your thesis include a comment about your position on the issue at hand?

Avoid merely announcing the topic; your original and specific "angle" should be clear. In this way you will tell your reader why your take on the issue matters.

- **A. Original thesis:** In this paper, I will discuss the relationship between fairy tales and early childhood.
- **B. Revised thesis:** Not just empty stories for kids, fairy tales shed light on the psychology of young children.

Avoid making universal or pro/con judgments that oversimplify complex issues

- **Original thesis:** We must save the whales.
- **Revised thesis:** Because our planet's health may depend upon biological diversity, we should save the whales.

When you make a (subjective) judgment call, specify and justify your reasoning. "Just because" is not a good reason for an argument.

- **Original thesis:** Socialism is the best form of government for Kenya.
- **Revised thesis:** If the government takes over industry in Kenya, the industry will become more efficient.

Avoid merely reporting a fact.

- **Original thesis:** Hoover's administration was rocked by scandal.
- **Revised thesis:** The many scandals of Hoover's administration revealed basic problems with the Republican Party's nominating process.

3. Is your thesis statement original?

Avoid, avoid, avoid generic arguments and formula statements.

- **Original thesis:**
 - There are advantages and disadvantages to using statistics. (a fill-in-the-blank formula)
- **Revised theses:**
 - Careful manipulation of data allows a researcher to use statistics to support any claim she desires.
 - In order to ensure accurate reporting, journalists must understand the real significance of the statistics they report.
 - Because advertisers consciously and unconsciously manipulate data, every consumer should learn how to evaluate statistical claims.

Avoid formula and generic words.



What is it?

- **Original:** "Society is..." [who is this "society" and what exactly is it doing?]
- **Revised:** "Men and women will learn how to...", "writers can generate...", "television addicts may chip away at...", "American educators must decide...", "taxpayers and legislators alike can help fix..."
- **Original:** "the media"
- **Revised:** "the new breed of television reporters," "advertisers," "hard-hitting print journalists," "horror flicks," "TV movies of the week," "sitcoms," "national public radio," "Top 40 bop-til-you-drop..."
- **Original:** "is, are, was, to be" or "to do, to make"
- **Revised:** any great action verb you can concoct: "to generate," "to demolish," "to batter," "to revolt," "to discover," "to flip," "to signify," "to endure..."

DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN A THESIS STATEMENT AND A TOPIC SENTENCE

The thesis statement and topic sentence have similarities, but they differ in several aspects. The topic sentence gives a glimpse of what the paragraph talks about, while the thesis statement contains the writer's conviction. The topic sentence connects to the thesis statement; the thesis statement encompasses all the other sentences in the essay. Because the thesis covers the entire essay or research paper, it is broader in scope than the topic sentence. Two or more ideas may be presented in a thesis statement, while only one idea should be contained in a topic sentence.